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The Private Bird Collection of Dr. Peter FREY at the Naturkundliches Heimatmuseum Düsseldorf-Benrath

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Abstract. Between 1888 and 1940, the physician and ornithologist Dr. Peter FREY compiled a rather extensive collection of palearctic birds, mainly from the vicinity of Leverkusen. It contains unique records of previous breeding species like Black Grouse, *Lyrurus tetrix*, Capercaillie, *Tetrao urogallus*, Ferruginous Duck, *Aythya nyroca* and Aquatic Warbler, *Acrocephalus paludicola*. The collection is now stored at the municipality of Leverkusen.

Key words. Historical collections, historical breeding ranges; Naturkundliches Heimatmuseum Benrath

1. THE COLLECTOR

The physician and ornithologist Dr. Peter FREY was born 22.11.1872 in Linnich (Rhineland) and practiced as physician in the German town Leverkusen-Wiesloch where he died 18.07.1954. The passionate field ornithologist and hunter never married. During his life he compiled a rather extensive collection of palearctic birds, mainly from the vicinity of Leverkusen, that was stored in two rooms of his house and practice at Wuppertal-Wiesloch. He prepared and mounted nearly all specimens himself and presented them lifelike in glass display cases, the wooden backgrounds neatly painted by his own hand.

2. HISTORY OF THE COLLECTION

Peter FREY tried in vain to convince the city of Leverkusen to take over his collection after his death and present it in a museum. By his last will he therefore arranged its sale to the Naturkundliches Heimatmuseum Benrath, to secure it through the care and curation of the director of the museum, his old friend Dr. Heinrich OPLADEN.

When the Naturkundliches Heimatmuseum Benrath lost its independence and was merged with the Löbbecke-Museum Düsseldorf after OPLADEN's death only two years later, the FREY collection lost its curator at the same instant and was given up to decay. During fundamental renovations of the Benrath Museum it was moved and great parts were completely destroyed in ignorance of its scientific value. The remains suffered from bad storage conditions and some parts of the collection are still lost.

In 1976, when the first author started his curatorship at the Naturkundliches Heimatmuseum Benrath, he

received the collection in even worse condition, due to the fact that most of the labels were lost or mixed up.

A nearly complete reconstruction of the FREY collection became possible due to some lucky circumstances. In 1954 the city of Leverkusen had ordered a complete photographic documentation (made by AGFA) of the collection before selling it to the museum in Benrath. The remains of this photo series and a complete inventory list with comments on finding localities were handed over to the Benrath Museum. Additionally, the lost catalogue was recovered together with a great part of the displaced collection of smaller birds without legs, that unfortunately had been cut off during removal from the display cases before storing.

This completion of information allowed reconstruction of the collection and listing all lost specimens. Today the collection is stored at the municipality of Leverkusen.

3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE OF THE COLLECTION

The first information on collection data and field observations was given by Peter FREY himself, when he published and edited his „Avifauna of Leverkusen“, which was distributed only in limited numbers (FREY 1948). Some of the collection data are unique documents of previous breeding ranges of bird species that soon after their documentation either became extinct or endangered (Red List Species), due to habitat loss and deterioration. Other scientists recognised the value of these collection data early and thus they were included in the succeeding avifaunas of the Rheinland (NEUBAUR 1957, MILDENBERGER 1982, 1984) or the Handbook of Birds of Middle Europe (GLUTZ VON BLOTZHEIM 1966-1997).

The most important of these records are perhaps those of Black Grouse, *Lyrurus tetrix*, Capercaillie, *Tetrao urogallus*, Ferruginous Duck, *Aythya nyroca* and Aquatic Warbler, *Acrocephalus paludicola*.

Black Grouse and Capercaillie were scarce breeders in the Rhein-Wupper region even in former days. FREY (1948) collected a male Black Grouse in 17.04.1926 at Reuschenberg, his last field observations stemming from 1933. The Capercaillie specimen, a female from Kirchen a. d. Sieg, collected November 1926, is now lost. All recorded Capercaillie individuals are treated by FREY (1948) as stragglers from the Sauerland area.

A nest of *Aythya nyroca* was secured by P. FREY in June 1937 in Reuschenberg, when the clutch was destroyed during hay-harvest. This is the first and sole certain breeding record of the Ferruginous Duck for the whole Rheinland area (GLUTZ VON BLOTZHEIM 1969).

The specimen of the Aquatic Warbler was mounted in a showcase together with Savi's Warbler, *Locustella luscinioides*, Grasshopper Warbler, *Locustella naevia*, Sedge Warbler, *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, Marsh Warbler, *Acrocephalus palustris*, Reed Warbler, *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, Great Reed Warbler, *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* and Blue-Throat, *Luscinia cyanecula*. All were collected in the Wupper estuaries and swamp areas at Leverkusen-Wiesdorf and -Bürrig between 1906 and 1931. Their status is given (FREY 1948) as common to regular breeding species with

exception of the Aquatic Warbler. The former occurrence and breeding records of these reed dwelling ecological specialists are evidence of undisturbed natural habitat conditions during that period.

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